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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS VOTE COUNT, QUICK COUNT,
CREDIBILITY

1. Summary: The February electoral decree provides five days for results to move from the voting centers (BVs) to the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) through the communal and departmental electoral bureaus (BECs/BEDs). MINUSTAH and the CEP have agreed that throughout the process, MINUSTAH will transport results and the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) will tally and announce them. However, while MINUSTAH prefers to move results by truck and helicopter, some CEP members prefer to transmit them by satellite. However, a recent partial test of the satellite system failed. MINUSTAH plans an internal quick count to verify results once they have reached the communal election bureaus (BECs). The Canadian Government contends MINUSTAH should not run the quick count because of its role in the electoral process. The EU Mission suggested that its monitoring mission might run a quick count instead. In addition, Canadian diplomats proposed using the USAID-funded political party support centers to bolster local press coverage of election night to help strengthen the credibility of the results. End Summary.

CEP will Count, MINUSTAH will Transport

2. The vote counting plan outlined in the February electoral decree called for results to be passed from voting centers to the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) through communal and departmental electoral bureaus, but the CEP and MINUSTAH support separate counting plans that would centralize as much of the process as possible. According to the February electoral decree, MINUSTAH and the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) will have five days to count votes and release results: 24 hours for results to reach the communal electoral bureaus (BEC) from the voting centers (BVs); 24 hours for the results to reach the departmental electoral bureaus (BEDs); and 48 hours for the results to reach the CEP. The CEP has long supported using the National Bank's V-SAT satellite communication system to transmit results from the BECs to Port-au-Prince and centralize results tabulation. The CEP arranged to use the National Bank of Haiti's old V-SAT system, but has not procured and installed the additional equipment necessary for satellite transmission in all of the BECs. During the week of October 31 - November 4, the CEP's first partial test of the system was unsuccessful because the National Bank's generator failed. MINUSTAH election officials agree that centralized counting would increase transparency, but argue the V-SAT system is too expensive and liable to fail. They advocate using helicopters to transport results (but not ballots, which will be securely stored near voting centers) from the BECs to Port-au-Prince and counting the results centrally.

MINUSTAH Proposes Quick Count - EU Better Option

3. In an effort to discourage cheating, MINUSTAH proposed a parallel quick count. According to MINUSTAH quick count consultant Glenn Cowan, MINUSTAH would use results from a sampling of 75 - 100 BECs, which would enable the quick count to be accurate to within 'a few' percent. Given the international presence on the ground, he said, a statistically relevant quick count would cost as little as USD 100,000.

4. Members of the international community support a quick count, but oppose MINUSTAH's involvement. A Canadian diplomat observed that because MINUSTAH is administering elections, not only is it already overburdened, Haitians would question its neutrality. Bias against MINUSTAH would undermine the purpose of the quick count by making it useless to publicly verify results. She also worried that losers might attempt to foment a nationalistic backlash by claiming MINUSTAH manipulated elections and covered its tracks by verifying its own work. Confronted with the Canadian assessment, LeChevallier said the quick count would be an internal MINUSTAH document used only to pressure the IGOH and CEP, verifying the Canadian assessment.

15. EU officers volunteered to consider a quick count as part of the EU monitoring mission. Friends of Haiti representatives supported the idea as the best source of a quick count and noted that the EU's 44 medium term, observers slated to arrive in the coming weeks, and 40 short-term observers, for election days, would provide coverage for an accurate quick count. The EU Mission has requested guidance from Brussels, but has not yet received a response.

Media Could Lend Results Credibility

16. The Canadian embassy unofficially proposed supporting elections results by funding the Haitian media to provide election night coverage from the BEC level. MINUSTAH elections officials agreed with the need for robust local media coverage, but said because most fraud is likely to occur before results arrive at the BECs, the same result could be achieved by reporting from the BED level. They proposed using the USAID funded political party centers as press buildings on election nights. USAID and UNOPS believe the plan is feasible and are exploring the technical aspects of how to best use the centers.

Quick Count Must be Neutral

17. Comment: Haiti's history of electoral fraud makes multiple-source reporting of results critical to accepted elections. However, a quick count must be a public document for it to be useful verifying results. A MINUSTAH quick count would fail in that measure, but an EU-run quick count would not. The EU's 84 total observers would provide roughly the right number of sample points from the BECs. Post recommends pushing the EU to include a quick count in its monitoring plan.

GRIFFITHS